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Viewing cable 06MANAGUA2617, BOLANOS TO A/S SHANNON: "WE HAVE TO CORRAL ORTEGA"

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Every cable message consists of three parts:

- The top box shows each cables unique reference number, when and by whom it originally was sent, and what its initial classification was.
- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
- The bottom box presents the body of the cable. The opening can contain a more specific subject, references to other cables ([browse by origin](#) to find them) or additional comment. This is followed by the main contents of the cable: a summary, a collection of specific topics and a comment section.

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Discussing cables

If you find meaningful or important information in a cable, please link directly to its unique reference number. Linking to a specific paragraph in the body of a cable is also possible by copying the appropriate link (to be found at the paragraph symbol). Please mark messages for social networking services like Twitter with the hash tags **#cablegate** and a hash containing the reference ID e.g. **#06MANAGUA2617**.

Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
06MANAGUA2617	2006-12-01 22:24	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL//NOFORN	Embassy Managua

Appears in these articles:

<http://www.nacion.com/2011-05-30/Mundo/NotasSecundarias/Mundo2758456.aspx>
<http://www.nacion.com/2011-05-30/Mundo/NotasSecundarias/Mundo2758467.aspx>
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<http://www.confidencial.com.ni/articulo/3991/dra-yadira-centeno-desmiente-cable-diplomatico-eeuu>
<http://www.confidencial.com.ni/articulo/3968/pellas-pronostico-a-eeuu-victoria-de-ortega-en-2006>

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RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHINGTON DC

C O N F I D E N T I A L MANAGUA 002617

SIPDIS

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DEPT FOR WHA A/S SHANNON, WHA/CEN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/29/2016
TAGS: [ECON](#) [KDEM](#) [NU](#) [PGOV](#)
SUBJECT: BOLANOS TO A/S SHANNON: "WE HAVE TO CORRAL ORTEGA"

Classified By: classified by Ambassador Paul Trivelli for reasons 1.4 b
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¶1. (C) SUMMARY: During a November 28 lunch hosted for Assistant Secretary Thomas Shannon, President Bolanos and his advisors shared their insights and concerns about an Ortega presidency and outlined the key points of a liberal opposition strategy. President Bolanos opined that Ortega has little room to maneuver and that paying his "social debt" will be very difficult without collapsing the economy. Political advisor Frank Arana acknowledged that Ortega, thus far, has delivered all the right messages, but he remains leery of Ortega,s true commitment. Concerned about Ortega's dictatorial ambitions, Bolanos and his advisors stressed the need to "control" Ortega through a unified opposition party in the National Assembly, greater empowerment of civil society, and a strong performance in the 2008 municipal elections. They admitted, however, that the challenge is daunting because the liberals have no experience as an opposition party. END SUMMARY.

Ortega Can Talk the Talk, but Can he Walk the Walk?

¶2. (C) In a November 28 lunch meeting hosted by President Bolanos for A/S Tom Shannon, President Bolanos opined that it would be impossible for Ortega to pay his "social debt" -- the promises he made during the campaign -- while maintaining economic growth. According to Bolanos, if Ortega fails to deliver on these promises, he will lose the core of his party,s supporters -- but delivering on them will cause the economy to collapse. He added that the FSLN, while adept at activism and organizing, does not know how to administer. Further, Political Advisor Frank Arana quipped that Ortega,s presidency may be "legal", but it is not "legitimate" because he was elected with only 38 percent of the vote. As a result, there will be more pressure on Ortega to perform and less room for error.

¶3. (C) Arana also conceded that Ortega,s initial conversations with the economic sector, the banking community, and the other Central American presidents have been very positive. He noted that Ortega is hitting all the right points, talking about CAFTA, the Millennium Challenge Account, closer cooperation among Central American countries, and improving relations with the United States. However, Arana warned, Ortega is highly skilled at telling people what they want to hear.

Liberals Fear Ortega Dynasty

¶4. (C) Bolanos, Arana, and Foreign Minister Norman Caldera conveyed their concerns that Ortega will not relinquish power at the end of his term and will do what he can to establish himself as "dictator". Bolanos pointed out that Ortega controls many of the State's critical institutions including the Supreme Electoral Council (CSE), Supreme Court (CSJ), and the offices of the Attorney General and Comptroller. Bolanos lamented that controlling Ortega without a functioning system of State checks and balances will be difficult, declaring that, "all hangs in the balance between democracy and dictatorship."

¶5. (C) Also referencing the FSLN's institutional control, Lindolfo Monjarretz, spokesperson for the presidency, cautioned that the FSLN is well-prepared and could use its control to impede reforms. He also admitted that former President Arnoldo Aleman, who continues to control the Liberal Constitutional Party's (PLC), is a complicating factor (in the liberal opposition's ability to control Ortega). According to Monjarretz, everyone knows Aleman is a problem, but no one knows what to do about him.

¶6. (C) Ambassador Trivelli proffered that the liberal opposition must convince Ortega that working with Aleman is no longer essential or even advantageous, and that the Nicaraguan Liberal Alliance (ALN), as the acknowledged second political force in Nicaragua, is the key to the future.

Strong Opposition is Key, but Liberals Have Little Experience

¶7. (C) Bolanos and Arana emphasized that the opposition's strategy must be to build a "corral" around Ortega in order to restrain his actions, reduce the influence of negative outside forces, and to force him to work within the existing system of democratic institutions. All agreed that a strong unified opposition is necessary to implement this strategy. Arana urged immediate consolidation of the liberal forces as a first step in order to provoke and promote reforms in civil society and in the National Assembly.

¶8. (C) Lindolfo Monjarretz pointed out, however, that the liberals have no history or experience as an opposition party because the liberals have been in power, in one form or another, for the past sixteen years. In contrast, the FSLN, after losing the elections in 1990, retreated, retrenched, and solidified power in key areas such as education and justice. Thus, advised Monjarretz, the liberals must take a step back and reflect before moving forward as an opposition party.

¶9. (C) A/S Tom Shannon agreed that having a strong opposition force will be important, but warned that it is not easy to build. He commented that 16 years in power have made the liberals good at administering the State, but have degraded their ability to build grassroots constituencies and express a long term vision for Nicaragua. Shannon further stated that the liberals must develop messages that civil society understands and continue to advance democracy to ensure that civil society does not fragment under an Ortega presidency.

Enabled Civil Society Will Act as Check on Ortega

¶10. (C) Bolanos echoed Arana's emphasis on building and re-enforcing civil society as a tactic to control Ortega. Commenting that he will use his seat in the National Assembly to vote on what he deemed the "10 percent of the legislation that is important," Bolanos plans to focus his attention on building Nicaragua's first presidential library and a political think tank in order to facilitate greater participation of civil society. The "virtual" library will include, in an electronic searchable format, contributions from the Central Bank, Central American University (UCA), and Ave Marie College as well as Bolanos, history as a public servant and his brother's extensive collection of historical

documents. (NOTE: Bolanos' brother Alejandro, who passed away earlier last year, was a renowned Nicaraguan historian with an extensive collection. END NOTE.)

2008 Municipal Elections: Another Check on Ortega

¶11. (C) Citing the close correlation between municipal-level voting outcomes in the presidential election and party control of municipal governments, Monjarretz suggested that the liberal,s containment strategy must also focus on winning in the 2008 municipal elections. He stressed that the opposition should use the next two years to build the mechanisms to enable victory in 2008 to position the party for victory in the 2011 presidential elections. Arana agreed, adding that the liberal opposition must find and develop "acceptable" candidates because municipal elections are often decided by only a few votes. (COMMENT: Arana,s emphasis on "acceptable" is in likely reference to finding candidates who can bridge the bitter divide between the ALN and the PLC created during the elections to represent the broader liberal opposition ideals. END COMMENT.)

Controlling the National Assembly

¶12. (C) Monjarretz and Arana also highlighted that the liberal opposition,s ability to consolidate power in the National Assembly in order to wrest control for high level appointments from Aleman and the PLC will be another way to keep Ortega,s ambitions in check. Monjarretz specifically mentioned the appointment of judges to the Supreme Court, a key institution in the legal enforcement of future reforms.

Shannon - Praises Bolanos, Sees Room for Dialogue with Ortega

¶13. (C) Shannon confirmed our commitment to Nicaragua and recognized Bolanos for the accomplishments of his administration including ratification of CAFTA, debt reduction, and the Millennium Challenge Account. To inquiries about his meeting with Ortega earlier in the day, Shannon responded that now is the time to open dialog with the President-elect. He reported that Ortega,s message was disciplined, raising points in the meeting related to support for CAFTA, democracy and positive relations with the United States and the need to form a good basis for future dialog. Shannon noted that we will go into a relationship with the Sandinistas with our eyes wide open, adding that it will take time to determine whether or not Ortega has changed. However, Shannon stressed that there is no doubt that Nicaragua has changed, and now has the political structures and civil society to restrain Ortega and protect Nicaraguan Democracy. Shannon re-iterated that Nicaragua is very important to us and that "we will continue to work together."

¶14. (U) Participants

Nicaragua:

President Enrique Bolanos
Foreign Minister Norman Caldera
Chief of Staff Leonardo Somarriba
Political Advisor Frank Arana
Private Secretary Lincoln Escobar
Presidential Spokesman Lindolfo Monjarretz
Political Advisor Pedro Solorzono

U.S.:

Assistant Secretary Tom Shannon
Ambassador Paul Trivelli
DCM Peter Brennan
Political Counselor Victoria Alvarado
Poloff Eric Mehler (note-taker)
TRIVELLI